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TWO DECADES OF CHANGE IN ALABAMA'S POPULATION: 1960-1970 and 1970-1980

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Abstract—Significant alterations have occurred in Alabama's population over the last two decades. The State's population, in excess of 3.8 million as of the 1980 census, grew at approximately twice the rate during the 1970s as during the 1960s. Population growth was characteristic of all seven of the State's major geographic regions and all eight Metropolitan Statistical Areas, with greatest growth generally occurring in the northern portion of the State and along the Gulf Coast. Non-whites, while experiencing a declining population during the 1960s, achieved a substantial gain during the 1970s as growth in that sector nearly matched that occurring among whites. Birth rates for both whites and non-whites have declined significantly over the last two decades, while crude death rates have increased slightly for whites but remained essentially unchanged among non-whites. The most dramatic change in the State's population, however, has involved migration—particularly changing migration tendencies among the non-white segment. Non-whites were leaving the State in large numbers during the 1960s, but only a very slight net migration loss occurred during the 1970s. Whether the growth of the 1970s continues is largely contingent on the State's economic situation. Migration into the State will undoubtedly be curtailed, for example, without significant improvement in the employment sector.

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Note—At the time the data for this report were compiled, the latest census reports available from the 1980 census were utilized. Subsequent adjustments and releases of data by the Bureau of the Census have resulted in minor changes in population totals for some Alabama counties. These alterations, however, do not affect the basic demographic trends, generalizations, etc., cited herein.

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FIGURE I
ALABAMA REGIONS AND COUNTIES

Two Decades of Change in Alabama's Population: 1960-1970 and 1970-1980

I. Introduction

Major changes have occurred in the size, distribution and character of Alabama's demographic portrait during the 1970s. There were at least eight significant outcomes of population dynamics in the previous decade.

- The State's population increased 12.9 percent. For the same period, the United States increased its numbers by 11.4 percent.
- The State's seven regions and eight Metropolitan Statistical Areas, with one exception each, experienced more rapid rates of increase during the 1970s than in the 1960s.
- Metropolitan and nonmetropolitan counties increased by 13.3 and 12.4 percent, respectively. Comparable increases for the United States as a whole were 9.8 and 15.8 percent.
- Over the past twenty years, the difference in the growth rates of metropolitan and nonmetropolitan counties has been dramatically reduced.
- Whites and non-whites contributed about the same share to the State's overall growth. Whites increased by 13.3 percent and non-whites by 12.1.
- Growth rates among whites were substantially higher in nonmetropolitan counties than those for non-whites. Non-white population growth in metropolitan counties, however, slightly outpaced white growth.
- The net migration rate for the State changed from a net loss during the 1960s to a net gain during the 1970s.
- Net migration became the major factor in the explanation of population increases among whites. Non-whites, on the other hand, moved from a substantial net migration loss during the 1960s to a much smaller rate of loss during the 1970s.

The report is designed to provide information regarding frequently asked questions about Alabama's population. The data are described at four levels of aggregation. First, the rate of change of the State's regions (see Figure 1),[1] counties, and Metropolitan Statistical Areas is analyzed for the past two decades. A second area of inquiry focuses on fertility, mortality, and migration rates. Each of these two is, in turn, analyzed by race.

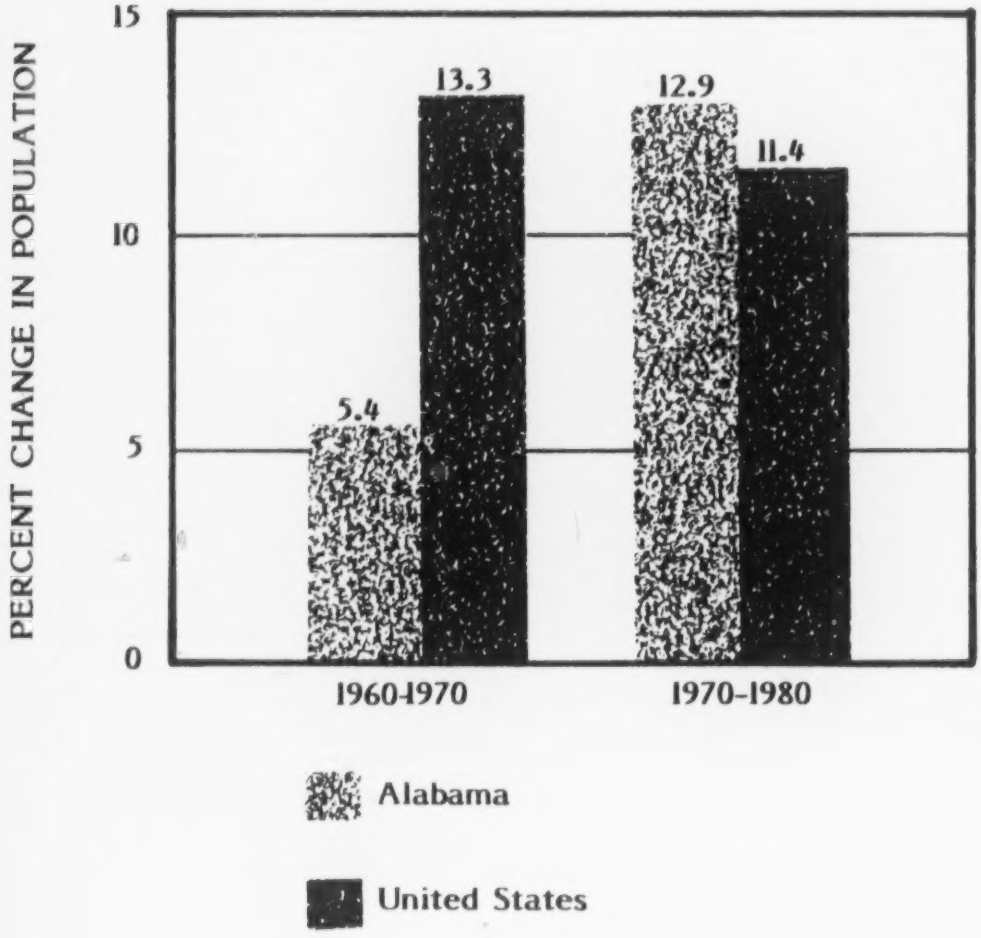
II. Overview of Population Changes: 1960-1980

Alabama's population grew over twice as fast during the 1970s as during the 1960s (Table I). For the earlier period, an annual average of 5.4 persons per thousand population were added to the State's population while during the latter the growth rate had increased to 12.9. The numerical increase totaled approximately 446,000 persons during the 1970s, but only about 177,000 during the 1960s. (See Figure 2.)

As expected, not all regions of the State experienced equal rates of growth. The highest rates of increase during the 1970s were generally recorded in the northern half of the State and along the Gulf Coast, while the lowest growth rates were concentrated in the Black Belt and Central Coastal Plain-Wire Grass areas. All regions of the State, with the exception of the Tennessee Valley-Sand Mountain area, achieved higher rates of growth during the 1970s than in the 1960s. Increased rates of growth ranged from twice as high (Central Coastal Plain-Wire Grass) to almost five times as high (Gulf Coast), while the Black Belt moved from a moderate net loss during the earlier decade to a moderate net gain during the latter.

FIGURE 2

PERCENT CHANGE IN POPULATION
1960-70 AND 1970-80,
ALABAMA AND THE UNITED STATES



Almost all Alabama counties experienced population increases during the 1970s. The only exceptions were six Black Belt counties and two Central Coastal Plain-Wire Grass counties. Fifty-nine of the State's sixty-seven counties, therefore, registered population gains. Between 1960 and 1970, however, population declines were recorded in almost half (i.e., thirty-two) of Alabama's counties, including every county in the Black Belt.

III. Gross Population Change—Regions, Counties and Metropolitan Statistical Areas

A. Regions and Counties

1. **Upper Coastal Plain.** The most rapidly growing region in Alabama during the 1970s was the Upper Coastal Plain. (See Table 1 for all data pertaining to Section III.) Population growth occurred over three times faster during the 1970s than in the 1960s, with the region adding 20.2 persons per thousand population annually during the last decade. All ten Upper Coastal Plain counties gained population, most at substantial rates. All but one county (Pickens) posted average annual growth rates in excess of 10.0, and all except three (Bibb, Lamar, and Pickens) achieved growth rates of 15.0 or more. Three counties in the area—Autauga, Elmore, and Marion—were among the most rapidly growing counties in the State during this period, with all adding in excess of 25.0 persons annually per thousand population.

Only three Upper Coastal Plain counties lost population during the 1960s and these three all experienced moderate to heavy gains during the 1970s. Pickens County, with a relatively high proportion of non-whites, moved from a loss of 7.1 persons per thousand population annually to a gain of 5.7, while Bibb and Chilton counties made the transition from slight losses (3.8 and 2.0, respectively) to substantial gains (13.8 and 21.6). All other counties showed considerably higher rates of gain during the latter decade than the former except Autauga. This county's average annual rate of growth (i.e., at approximately 30.0) remained essentially unchanged over the two time periods.

2. **Gulf Coast.** The second most rapidly growing area of the State during the 1970s was the Gulf Coast. This region's growth rate has increased approximately five-fold over the two decades, and during the last ten years all three counties within the area have exhibited fairly sizable rates of increase. The largest gain during the 1970s, however, occurred in Baldwin County. Approximately 32.0 persons per thousand population annually were added, making this county one of the fastest growing in the State. Growth rates recorded for Mobile and Escambia counties amounted to only about one-half and one-third of that registered in Baldwin.

Although Baldwin County experienced high average annual growth rates during both decades (i.e., 21.0 and 32.1), Escambia and Mobile counties grew only slightly during the 1960s. While the growth rate for Baldwin County increased by a factor of 1.5 between the 1960s and the 1970s, however, Escambia's rate of growth was 2.4 times greater, and Mobile's a huge 14.8.

3. **Piedmont, Tennessee Valley-Sand Mountain, and Upper Coosa Basin.** These three regions of the State experienced population increases during the 1970s very close to that registered for the State as a whole. The Piedmont and Tennessee Valley-Sand Mountain regions were slightly above the State average (with average annual growth rates of 15.1 and 14.2) while the Upper Coosa Basin grew at slightly below the state average (at 12.2).

a. **The Piedmont.** This region, from the standpoint of land area, is the second smallest of the regional delineations utilized in the present analysis. Only seven counties are considered to be a part of this area, none of which are classified as "metropolitan." The area's largest cities include Auburn-Opelika (a combined population of 50,367 in 1980) and Alexander City (13,807).

The growth rate recorded in this region during the 1970s was approximately 3.4 times greater than that which occurred during the 1960s (i.e., 15.1 versus 4.5). All seven counties showed higher growth rates during the most recent decade than in the earlier, when

either slight to substantial increases (three counties) or slight to moderate decreases (four counties) were observed.

Lee was the region's most rapidly growing county during both decades. Approximately 24.0 persons were added annually per thousand population during each period. This county, which is the site of Auburn University, attracted a large influx of younger persons during the 1960s and 1970s, some of which were engaged in the family formation process adding still further to population increase. The average annual growth rate in two other counties (Cleburne and Tallapoosa) was in excess of 14.0 during the 1970s, with the others ranging from 6.7 to 9.5.

b. **Tennessee Valley-Sand Mountain.** Population growth in this region was actually less during the 1970s than in the 1960s. During the earlier period, the average annual growth rate was approximately 24.0 but during the latter it had dropped to 14.2 (a decrease of 41.0 percent). A major reason for the reduction traces to the out-migration that occurred in Madison County (and Huntsville) after funding cuts in various NASA programs. While an annual average of 59.0 persons per thousand were added to this county during the 1960s (a period of rapid development in the space industry), the growth rate was only 5.6 during the 1970s.

Of the three other counties showing lower growth rates during the 1970s than in the 1960s (Lawrence, Limestone, and Morgan), two are contiguous to Madison (Limestone and Morgan). Presumably, this pattern reflects, at least in part, the slowdown in growth associated with Madison County. Although a scant majority of these northern Alabama counties (i.e., five of nine) showed increased rates of growth between the 1960s and 1970s, substantially higher growth rates were characteristic of Jackson (Scottsboro) and DeKalb (Ft. Payne)—both located in the extreme northeastern part of the State.

While all counties in this region gained population during the 1970s, actual growth rates varied considerably. All, however, had average annual growth rates in excess of 10.0 except Colbert (at 9.8) and Madison (5.6). Jackson, DeKalb, and Marshall, the region's most rapidly growing counties, all achieved average annual growth rates in excess of 20.0.

c. **Upper Coosa Basin.** This region contains the largest Metropolitan Statistical Area in the State (the Birmingham MSA, encompassing Jefferson, St. Clair, Shelby, and Walker counties), along with two other metropolitan centers (Anniston and Gadsden, including Calhoun and Etowah counties). Six of the eleven counties located in this area, therefore, are defined by the Bureau of the Census as "metropolitan" in character.

Overall, the growth rate has increased approximately fourfold in the Upper Coosa Basin over the last two decades. An annual average growth rate of only 3.1 was posted during the 1960s, while the rate increased to 12.2 during the 1970s. In addition, all counties lying within the region either experienced increased rates of growth over the two time periods, or moved from losses to gains. For many of these counties, the growth rate during the most recent decade was several times greater than that which occured during the 1960s (e.g., Blount, St. Clair, Shelby, Walker, etc.).

The three most rapidly growing counties in the State during the 1970s are found in this area—Shelby (adding a phenomenal 74.3 persons per thousand population annually), St. Clair (increasing by 47.4) and Blount (adding 35.8). Winston County also increased at a pace (i.e., a growth rate of 31.8) which places it among the State's leading gainers. Although all counties within the region experienced gains during the most recent decade, Cherokee, Etowah, and Talladega had slight to moderate declines during the 1960s.

The area's most rapidly growing counties during the 1970s (i.e., Shelby, St. Clair, and Blount) are all contiguous to Jefferson County (Birmingham). In addition, Walker County—also adjacent to Jefferson—increased very rapidly. This pattern undoubtedly reflects a continuing tendency for intra-city residents to move away from the urban core and for new residents to settle in locales somewhat removed from the central city. The data revealed, for

example, that the rate of increase for Jefferson County during the 1970s (at 4.1) was the lowest recorded for any county in this region. The trend toward suburbanization of Alabama's central city residents reflects population redistribution patterns which also hold for the United States generally. Such trends were set in motion much earlier in the 20th century, but reached their greatest level of visibility in most American cities during the 1950s and 1960s.[2]

4. **Central Coastal Plain-Wire Grass.** Most of the counties (eleven of sixteen) located in this region were marked by population declines during the 1960s. Overall, however, the area was still able to register an average annual growth rate of 4.0. This pattern is largely accounted for by the huge gain (a growth rate of 70.4) occurring in Dale County. Fort Rucker, a massive helicopter pilot training center, is located in this county, and the huge troop build-up associated with the Vietnamese conflict was responsible for bringing several thousand new residents into the county.

During the 1970s, however, only two counties—Butler and Dale—recorded population losses. The overall growth rate doubled (8.1 vis-a-vis only 4.0) and Houston County (Dothan) emerged as the area's fastest growing county, as well as one of the most rapidly growing in the State. This county, for example, gained at an average annual rate of 31.9 during the 1970s, approximately a three-fold increase over that recorded during the 1960s. Butler was the only county to lose population during both time periods, although the rate of loss was cut substantially during the most recent decade. Most of the other counties have shown either increased rates of growth over the last twenty years (e.g., Houston) or a change from declining numbers to population gains (several counties).

The Central Coastal Plain-Wire Grass counties with the highest rates of increase during the 1970s were generally contiguous or in close proximity to Houston County (e.g., Coffee, Geneva, and Henry counties). This indicates, in part, the growing influence of Dothan as a regional service and distribution center. Growth rates in the westernmost counties (e.g., Choctaw, Clark, and Washington), however, were much more restrained.

Russell County, part of the Columbus, Georgia, Metropolitan Statistical Area, gained only about 4.0 persons per thousand population annually during the 1970s, while the rate of loss in Dale County—the region's (and State's) largest population gainer during the 1960s—was nearly 10.0. Pike County, the location of Troy and the site of Troy State University, also showed substantial population change (from a rate of loss of 3.7 during the 1960s to a gain of 12.0 during the 1970s). As in the case for Lee County, the in-migration of college bound youth undoubtedly explains much of the variation.

5. **Black Belt.** The Black Belt was the slowest growing region in Alabama during the 1970s. Still, however, the population increased at a rate approximately 60.0 percent of that for the entire State. Nearly 8.0 persons were added per thousand population annually during this period (12.9 for the State as a whole), with close to a majority of these counties (i.e., five of eleven) showing gains.

This pattern, however, represents considerable deviation from that which characterized the 1960s. During that period, the Black Belt was losing numbers at an average annual rate of approximately 7.0. It was the only region of the State experiencing a declining population, and all counties within the region were registering population decreases (most by substantial margins). During the 1970s, however, regional growth approached the State average, and for all counties (except Dallas) rates of loss were either reduced or there was a transition from losses to gains. In Dallas County, however, the rate of growth remained stationary over the two time periods.

The most substantial Black Belt gains by far during the 1970s were concentrated in Montgomery County (a growth rate slightly in excess of 17.0). Macon County also experienced a moderate rate of increase, as did Marengo, Greene, and Lowndes counties Significant losses, reflecting the pattern of the 1960s, were still the rule, however, in Bullock and Wilcox counties.

B. Metropolitan Statistical Areas

Since the early part of the 20th century the Bureau of the Census has provided various conceptual tools for use in the population analysis of the nation's larger towns and urban centers. In 1910, the term "Metropolitan District" was used to delineate major urban concentrations. After various alterations in definition, "Standard Metropolitan Area" was adopted for the 1950 census, while "Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area" was utilized in 1960 and 1970. Beginning this year, however, reflecting further redefinitions, the nomenclature has become "Metropolitan Statistical Area" (MSA), and metropolitan areas henceforth will be classified according to population size into one of four main categories or "levels."[3]

To qualify as a MSA, an area (i.e., county or counties) must have a central city of at least 50,000 population within its corporate limits, or an urbanized area of at least 50,000, *and* a total Metropolitan Statistical Area population of at least 100,000. Contiguous counties are included in MSA designation if certain requirements pertaining to social and economic integration with the central city are satisfied.[4] As of the 1980 census, eight such areas were so designated in Alabama, involving seventeen counties. In addition, Russell County (Phenix City) is included in the Columbus, Georgia MSA, bringing the total number of metropolitan counties lying within the State to eighteen.

Alabama's metropolitan counties grew slightly faster than nonmetropolitan counties, as well as a little faster than the State as a whole, during the 1970s. A higher growth rate for the State's largest urban centers also held during the 1960s, except in this instance metropolitan counties increased at better than twice the pace of nonmetropolitan counties.

Although the rate of population growth has increased substantially for both categories of counties over the last two decades, the magnitude of the increase was much greater for nonmetropolitan than metropolitan counties. While nonmetropolitan counties, therefore, achieved better than a fourfold increase in rate of growth (from 2.8 to 12.4), metropolitan counties approximately doubled (from 7.1 to 13.3). Nonmetropolitan growth in Alabama over the last twenty years has followed a pattern similar to that observed for the U.S. as a whole (an increase of 4.0 percent for the U.S. during the 1960s as opposed to 15.8 percent during the 1970s). While Alabama's rate of metropolitan growth has also increased dramatically, however, that for the U.S. has been cut by approximately one-half (from 17.0 percent to 9.8).[5]

The most rapidly growing MSA in the State during the 1970s, with an average annual growth rate of approximately 21.0, was Montgomery. Trailing only slightly behind were the Tuscaloosa and Mobile MSAs (adding 18.5 and 17.6 per thousand population annually). In addition, three of the remaining five (Florence, Anniston, and Birmingham) had growth rates in excess of 10.0.

All metropolitan areas except Huntsville either experienced an increased rate of growth, or moved from a slight loss to a moderate gain between the 1960s and 1970s. Accelerating growth rates were particularly characteristic of the Montgomery and Mobile MSAs. The Huntsville MSA, which registered heavy population gains during the 1960s, experienced only moderate growth during the 1970s. The Gadsden MSA and Russell County (Columbus, Georgia MSA), however, both moved from population losses to increases.

Of metropolitan counties containing central cities (i.e., the urban center responsible for MSA designation), Tuscaloosa and Lauderdale (Florence), with growth rates of 18.5 and 18.2, increased at the fastest pace during the 1970s. Montgomery, Mobile, and Calhoun (Anniston) also showed substantial rates of increase. Jefferson County, however, the State's most populous county and the site of Alabama's largest city, added only about 4.0 persons annually per thousand population.

Of noncentral city, metropolitan counties, the highest rates of increase occurred in those contiguous to Jefferson. Shelby, St. Clair, and Walker, for example, all recorded impressive growth rates. In addition, metropolitan counties

contiguous to Montgomery (i.e., Autauga and Elmore), Huntsville (Limestone and Marshall), and Mobile (Baldwin) also exhibited a similar pattern.

Compared with the 1960s, significantly higher levels of growth during the 1970s were the rule for Shelby, St. Clair, and Walker counties (all, as noted, surrounding Birmingham and Jefferson County) and Elmore County (lying within the Montgomery MSA). All experienced increased rates of growth ranging from three times greater (Elmore County) to approximately six times greater (Walker County). In these cases, heavy movement from the central city to the suburbs (commonly referred to as "urban spillover") and the tendency for new residents to establish domiciles in outlying communities probably account for much of the increase.

IV. Population Changes According to Race

Both major segments of Alabama's population—white and non-white—grew at approximately the same level during the 1970s. Whites increased at a rate of 13.3 persons per thousand population annually, while the non-white growth rate was 12.1. The net gain for whites, therefore, was only 1.2 persons greater per thousand population than that for non-whites. (See Table 2 for all data pertaining to this section.)

While the white growth rate has varied little over the last two decades (11.0 vis-a-vis 13.3), just the opposite has been the case for non-whites. A moderate net loss was characteristic of this group during the 1960s (an average annual rate of decline of 7.4), but a substantial increase (i.e., 12.1) occurred during the 1970s. (See Figure 3.)

The spectre of non-white population gains represents considerable deviation from past trends. Prior to the 1970s, Alabama's non-white population—and that throughout the South generally—had been characterized by heavy net migration losses as blacks journeyed to the urban, industrial centers of the Northeast, Midwest, and West in search of better economic opportunities.[6] With the dawn of the 1970s, however, the number leaving and the number returning became much more evenly balanced;[7] and, by the late 1970s, more non-whites (by almost a two-to-one margin) were entering the South than the number leaving.[8] Although Alabama was still experiencing slight net migration losses among non-whites during the 1970s, the rate of decline had been greatly curtailed. (A detailed discussion of these trends is presented in Section VI of this report.)

Non-white population increases over the last ten years have been most heavily concentrated in metropolitan counties. The non-white growth rate in these counties totaled 15.4, outpacing that among whites by approximately 3.0 persons per thousand population annually. In nonmetropolitan counties, however, the pattern was just reversed, with whites increasing at a two-to-one margin over non-whites.

While growth rates among whites living in both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan counties have increased over the last two decades, but have not varied greatly according to type of county, corresponding changes among non-whites in both residential sectors have been quite substantial. Non-whites in metropolitan counties, for example, were declining at an average annual rate of 3.2 during the 1960s, but gaining by 15.4 during the 1970s. And while the growth rate for nonmetropolitan blacks during the most recent decade fell considerably short of that recorded for those in metropolitan counties (7.1 versus 15.4), the transition that occurred in these counties over these two time periods (i.e., from -13.1 to 7.1, or a net change of 20.2 persons per thousand population) was actually slightly greater than that which took place in more populous sectors (from -3.2 to 15.4, for a net change of 18.6).

A. Whites

1. **Regions.** All seven regions of the State during both time periods were characterized by population increases among whites. For the most recent decade, all but one (the Black Belt) exhibited medium to high levels of increase. While growth rates in other regions ranged from a low of 9.1 (Central Coastal Plain-Wire Grass) to a high of 20.8 (Upper Coastal Plain), the Black Belt